

Arlington Redevelopment Board
June 1, 2015 Minutes
Town Hall Annex, Second Floor Conference Room, Town Hall – 7:00pm

This meeting was recorded by ACMi.

Approved June 22, 2015

PRESENT: Chair, Andrew Bunnell, Mike Cayer, Bruce Fitzsimmons, Andy West

ABSENT:

STAFF: Carol Kowalski

Documents Used:

Lexington Tree Bylaw

Memo dated May 28, 2015 and Memo Addendum dated June 1, 2015

Gamble and Associates poster from Watertown

Photo of Greenville, South Carolina provided by Bruce Fitzsimmons

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 7:02pm and turned to the first agenda item of the Open Meeting Law complaint filed by Chris Loreti. Mr. Fitzsimmons summarized that the complaint alleges that a question posed by a member of the audience was not included in the minutes. Mr. Fitzsimmons said the Board feels that the minutes accurately reflect what was discussed on the night in question, and added that the minutes are not a transcript. The Board agreed that the minutes do not need to be amended. Mr. Fitzsimmons moved that Town Counsel be authorized to prepare a response to the Attorney General's office with respect to these allegations. Mr. West seconded. All voted in favor.

The Board moved to the next item on the agenda, a presentation by the Tree Committee and discussion on tree protection. Susan Stamps, 31 Grafton Street, and Mary Ellen Arownow, 22 Addison Street, of the Arlington Tree Committee introduced themselves to the Board. Ms. Stamps stated that a resident came to the Arlington Tree Committee when his leafy residence was rendered barren after a demolition and rebuild. The Tree Committee asked Mike Rademacher, Director of Public Works about the incident, and Mr. Rademacher stated that no one is tasked with the responsibility of tree preservation on private property. Ms. Stamps referenced the Town of Lexington's Tree Bylaw, the May 28, 2015 memo to the Board, with a June 1, 2015 addendum. Ms. Stamps said she would like to work with the Board and staff to get a bylaw before Town Meeting. She added that Cambridge, Newton, Brookline, Weston, and Lexington all regulate tree removal by builders on private property. Ms. Stamps said that this issue applies only within the context of major construction, or within a certain setback requirement. The setback issue is a huge challenge within Arlington.

Mr. Fitzsimmons asked if the Tree Committee saw this as a Zoning Bylaw issue, or a General Bylaw issue. Ms. Stamps said that it seemed it could have characteristics of both. Mr. Fitzsimmons discussed the pros and cons of each, and stated that he felt it was a General Bylaw issue. He also asked for clarification that the Lexington Bylaw is being presented as a model. Ms. Stamps confirmed and summarized potential characteristics of trees that could be protected versus those that would not necessarily be protected. Ms. Stamps referenced the Neighborhood Conservation Districts mentioned in the Master Plan and the Scenic Road Bylaw as a way of designated land as public property.

Mr. Cayer said he viewed this more as a General Bylaw issue. He cited Lexington's Tree Manual and said this seemed like there is a lot of work to be done. Ms. Stamps said that Arlington doesn't need to create a tree manual. Mr. Cayer stated that this has the potential to be quite controversial. Lexington has quite a few houses on Lowell Street that went up after this bylaw, yet there were clear cuts. Mr. Cayer referenced the handout with before and after photos of tree removal and said it didn't look like there were a lot of 8" trees to begin with. As a Town Meeting Member, Mr. Cayer stated that he sees a lot of challenges with this.

Sally Naish, a member of the Tree Committee said that she sees Mr. Cayer's point about the tree pictures; the discrepancy is in part the loss of density of trees on abutters' properties. For example, on 27 Oldham Road there were about 13 mature trees removed. Ms. Nash said some of the trees appear

to be on a public tree strip, and she would be curious to know if they got permission to remove those trees.

The Board agreed that overall this idea would need some work. If there was a practical way to work on this, the Board appreciates the step. Overall, what matters is the way the street feels. Mr. Bunnell opened the floor for comment.

Laura Bergan, 15 Lakeview Street and previously Lombard Terrace, stated that she witnessed a neighboring house sell the property to a developer from out of Town who erected 2 cement walls and removed healthy, mature trees. She counted 40 stumps cut down. These trees screened the noise of Route 2 and secured the hillside. She added that in Virginia and Maryland you can't just down trees, adding that what happened on Lakeview Street and Spring Valley is a travesty.

Alice Jardeen, 21 Spring Valley, provided an example of a historic lane that was clear cut near her house. This is a historical lane where one of the first battles of the American Revolution took place, and all the horses had been buried there. It is a historical treasure that has been trashed. A 28 year old developer from Revere didn't know this was a historic lane. She said she urges the Board to take a look at these areas because this refuge was destroyed.

Deanne Dupont, 32 Oldham Road, mentioned that removing trees worsens runoff. In the case of 27 Oldham Road, it is clear that two parts of the Town weren't talking to each other because the Town has problems with water absorption, yet they continue to approve the removal of trees. She stated she spent over \$10,000.00 to mitigate the water problems that resulted from removing the trees and putting a larger building footprint next door. It is costing the Town money for mitigation and costs more to live in her home.

Larry Englisher, 6 Lantern Lane, said that almost 20 homes in a 2-3 block radius have been rebuilt, and enormous trees have been cut down. He stated that the zoning code doesn't reflect the neighborhoods of today. The whole character is worsening, and zoning is supposed to protect character. Mr. Englisher stated that we have to act right away or it will be too late. He is confident that the Redevelopment Board staff and the Tree Committee can work together.

Mr. Fitzsimmons offered encouragement and advice to the Tree Committee. First, they need to figure out if this is a Zoning Article, or a General Bylaw Article. If it's a Zoning Article, they are in the right place; if it's a Bylaw Article they will need to deal with the Board of Selectmen. If the Tree Committee were to base the bylaw off of the Lexington bylaw, the tree manual is essential. The Tree Committee does not want Town Meeting to say it is vague. Mr. Fitzsimmons added that the Committee needs to present these items as one; otherwise they will lose a lot of votes if it appears vague. The Tree Committee also needs to determine what the triggers would be, and how expansive they want this article to be. Mr. Cayer added that the essence of it will be taking someone's private property rights away, so it makes sense to get the work done whether it's a general or zoning bylaw issue.

Mr. Bunnell turned to the agenda item of Design Standards Update with David Gamble. Mr. Gamble explained that he was working with the Town on a set of design standards. He asked for feedback on the structure of the standards which are very Arlington specific. There is also a test case scenario for a site poised for redevelopment following these guidelines. Also, he asked for preparation advice for the June 15th public presentation. Mr. Gamble presented an example of a poster used for another Town.

Mr. West recommended including an identifying map of the Mill Brook corridor since it is hard to understand what you're setting back from without a visual. Since the Mill Brook doesn't act like Broadway or Mass. Ave., it needs to be defined.

Mr. Cayer brought up building height. It is a little scary looking, since people in Arlington are not used to it. As long as buildings of varying height are introduced it will be ok. Looking at Minuteman Bikeway and the Mill Brook corridor, the height listed in this document may appear too dense.

Mr. Fitzsimmons recommended using a word other than “corridor” during the presentation. Mr. Fitzsimmons advised on how to best present the corridors to the public, and the issue of height. He recommended really explaining setbacks to the public in the beginning. The Mill Brook is a great area for mixed use development, but if everything becomes five stories than something gets lost. The key would be to keep older buildings while introducing new features. Mr. Fitzsimmons provided a photo of Greenville, SC and discussed certain elements of their design plan that works well, such as lighting, public activity, an old cotton mill, cafes, a performing arts center, and a mix of high and low building heights. Mr. Cayer stressed that we don’t want people building without public access, such as the Mill Brook Condos because it deadens what should be a great resource.

The Board and Mr. Gamble discussed the most effective way to present each corridor at the public meeting. Mr. Gamble added that he didn’t want this become too formulaic since these are such complex areas. Ms. Kowalski recommended pulling a map of the Mill Brook Study Area and breaking it down into subsections. Mr. Gamble added that the language for the Mill Brook area could be more flexible for this area, versus the other corridors.

Mr. Gamble passed out a handout for a test case which considers the Walgreens site in regards to the design standards and explained each element to the Board. Mr. Gamble said the current footprint is 15,000 sqft. The test case would change that to 30,000 sqft of office space, 18,000 sqft of retail, 18,000 sqft of housing, 3,000 sqft of a restaurant, and overlies on underground parking which could fit about 90 cars.

The Board gave feedback to the test case about what works well, and what could be adjusted slightly to better fit the needs to the Town.

Laura Wiener, Assistant Director of Planning and Community Development asked Mr. Gamble to explain to the Board why 5 stories have been proposed in some of these plans, and the pros and cons of building that height. Mr. Gamble explained that up to 5 stories the buildings are stick built, wood construction. Beyond 5 stories, there are fewer developers who would want to do that. Ms. Wiener suggested that Mr. Gamble explain this during the presentation. Mr. Fitzsimmons added that parking needs to be discussed in the presentation.

The Board thanked the Board for Mr. Gamble’s efforts and moved on to the agenda item of Master Plan Implementation Committee composition. Ms. Kowalski reviewed the updates and edits that have been made to the list of potential members. Ms. Kowalski said she wants to make sure this group stays a true Redevelopment Board committee, and has a member of the ARB on the committee.

Mr. Cayer asked how long this Committee will live for. Ms. Kowalski thinks this committee should have a life until the Master Plan is updated, which is about every 5 years. The Board discussed edits that should be made to the list of suggested members.

The Board turned to the agenda item of the minutes from May 11, 2015. Mr. West moved to approved. Mr. Cayer seconded. The Board reviewed the minutes from May 18, 2015. Mr. Cayer moved to approve as amended. Mr. Fitzsimmons seconded. All voted in favor. Mr. Cayer moved to adjourn. Mr. West seconded. All voted in favor.